

Stripping and Refinishing Your Furniture

By Carolyn J. Clarke, Furniture Rejuvenator

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Before you begin...

- 1 All furniture refinishing work must be done in a well ventilated area. Chemicals in strippers and thinners are highly toxic. They are absorbed into the body through the breath into the lungs and through the pores of the skin. This is very important.
- 2 Wear eye goggles for protection, especially when working with stripper and chemicals.
- 3 Keep a jar of clear, fresh water close by in case stripper gets accidentally splashed in eyes. Water bathed over the eyes will neutralize the stripper, whereas nothing else will.
- 4 It is very important to wear gloves and full protective clothing when refinishing. Wear your oldest grubby clothing that covers all of your skin. Stripper burns skin!
- 5 Cover work area with plastic drop sheets or newspaper to prevent mess and make it easier to clean up afterwards.
- 6 Also, pull your hair back (guys, too) and create as dust-free an environment as possible to prevent unexpected flecks of dust and hair in your new finish and wet lacquer
- 7 If your furniture piece has upholstery that needs protecting, use plastic and painting masking tape to cover completely, as stripper and thinners will destroy fabric.

Stripping your Furniture

Make sure you have all tools gathered beforehand... refer to attached list... and have conveniently close by. After covering your work area with plastic or paper, pour get stripper into a wide-mouthed jar or tin can.

Wearing protective clothing, gloves and goggles, brush the stripper onto a small-ish area only. Leave the stripper to "do its work" for a few minutes then use a putty knife, scraper and steel wool to scrape off excess. Be very careful to not gouge the wood with tools!

After applying another coat of stripper use a pad of rough steel wool and scrub with the grain to remove as much messy material as possible. Put messy goop into a garbage-related receptacle. In the meantime, paint stripper onto another small-ish patch of your furniture, allowing it time to soak in and bubble the old finish.

After getting as much old finish off as possible in this way using the gel stripper, then wash your piece down with lacquer thinner and steel wool. Because thinner evaporates so quickly, it is best to do a small surface at a time, wiping thoroughly with clean rags. Again, it's very important to scrub WITH the grain, so as not to scratch the wood. (Be sure to seal the lacquer thinner can afterwards and store in a safe place.) After completing this process, you are now ready to go on to the next procedure, being the wood preparation and staining before applying the new finish. It is decision time... oil or lacquer finish?

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Preparation and Staining, Pre-Finish

Filling

If your piece of furniture has scratches or gouges, now is the time to fill them before sanding and applying a new finish. I recommend Fix Wood Patch natural filler as being one of the better products available.

Refrain from using putty as it does not dry as well as the filler. Plastic and acrylic fillers do not accept stain as well as the Fix Wood Patch.

***** Important – use just enough filler to fill the hole! It is not necessary to heap it up, for the excess will only have to be sanded off once dry, plus filler will clog surrounding wood pores and will be more visible after the finish is applied. Keep it as small as possible for the best results possible.**

Sanding

If your piece of furniture has many scratches or unevenness in colour, attach 80 or 100-grit sandpaper to a sanding block and sand in the direction of the grain only, applying even pressure over the whole piece until evenness and consistency of colour is achieved.

After removing unevenness and marks, change to a finer grit of paper (150) and sand again until smooth. Shift then to 220-grit for an even smoother effect, and if your piece is a table top or large surface, finish up with 320-grit sandpaper for a satin feel.

If your furniture piece has minimal marks and require little sanding to correct, start with 150-grit sandpaper, before finishing with 220-grit.

***** DO NOT concentrate your sanding in focused areas or ripples and dips will result. And, be extra careful when sanding if your furniture is covered in veneer! Veneer is very shallow wood glued to another surface and can be sanded right through quite easily.**

***** If you choose to use an electric sander, I highly recommend that you DO NOT use a circular sander. Mini circles may be visible on your furniture in the lacquer finish.**

Sanding Summary...

- 1 Start with 80 or 100-grit sandpaper if your furniture is marked**
- 2 ... move to 150-grit (or start here if furniture is not necessarily marked)**
- 3 ... move to 220-grit**
- 4 ... and finish with 320-grit sandpaper if seeking a satin finish on a larger surface.**

***** Tip: If you are working on a wood item that has fancy, turned spindles, instead of sanding use rough steel wool by wrapping the pad around each spindle and twist back and forth. This is the ONLY exception for going against the grain of the wood!**

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Staining

Before staining, dust your piece down completely using a clean cotton cloth, free from “fuzzies.” Using a 1” paint brush or rag, apply well stirred stain onto small surface of your piece.

Example – Stain the entire table top then wipe excess off, or stain chair back then wipe excess stain off. Don’t try to stain the whole piece and expect to get the stain evenly applied and wiped off. Most stains

dry fairly quickly and become quite sticky to work with.

After leaving the stain on for a few moments, wipe off the excess thoroughly with a clean rag. If item ends up uneven in colour, try applying another thin coat of stain and leaving slightly longer before wiping off excess. When finished staining, clean brush in thinners and dispense of rags in a careful way... some stains are prone to becoming flammable.

Read the side of the stain can for drying time and place the furniture piece in a dust-free area until ready to proceed with the next step in refinishing.

Types of Stain

Personally, I am especially partial to using Mohawk's Wiping Stains. They are very easy to use and produce consistently deeply coloured wood enhancements. With the exception of mahogany, most woods accept a surface pigment stain quite nicely, giving a rich colour then ready for lacquer.

Mahogany is a very open-grained type of wood that requires a stain with a built-in filler to close the open pores... Flecto brand stain is one suitable brand to use in this case.

When about to choose your stain, if you have a sample to match to, take the sample with you to Mohawk Finishing Supplies or a paint and wood-finishing store to check against their colour charts. There are many good products on the market to choose from these days so don't feel confined to one particular brand.

Sealing and Lacquering

After allowing your wood piece to completely dry after staining, lightly spray Sanding Sealer, using back and forth movements. This application will ensure sealing the colour exactly the way you want it before the final application of lacquer or oil. It is important to move the spray can continuously while spraying or runs will occur! Keep the spray can in continual motion. Rather than one heavy coat, apply two lighter coats. (If sealer dries white, do not worry, the next lacquer step will correct it.)

Once the sanding sealer is dry (5 – 10 minutes), use a very fine pad of steel wool to lightly rub your wood piece down to extract inevitable dust flecks and hair, etc. Important – Wipe wood piece down thoroughly with a clean, lint-free rag. Blow steel wool and dust from all corners.

Application of the lacquer is essentially the same procedure as with applying the sanding sealer, but more accuracy and attention is necessary. Again, rather than spraying one heavy coat spray two or three lighter coats, with drying time being approximately ten minutes in between coats.

***** It is ESSENTIAL that you spray in a well-ventilated, dust-free room... wearing a mask while you're spraying!**

Once your wood piece is completely dry, put in a safe place overnight, allowing lacquer to "cure" and totally harden. The following day, gently use an extra-fine pad of steel wool to remove any dust bumps. Though the lacquer will look slightly dulled by this procedure, once you apply a coat of paste wax (AeroWax or MinWax are good products), your shine will return beautifully. Paste Wax is necessary only every 4 -6 months, with good dustings in between.

***** NOTE – I urge you to not use spray waxes (such as Pledge, etc.) on your valuable furniture! These waxes contain silicone which gets absorbed into the wood pores and collects with every application. Over time, the finish will slowly turn milky white and the shine will become shallow and artificial. Also, wood pieces that have been treated with these spray waxes are almost impossible to strip and refinish, for**

the silicone will always remain deep in the wood, creating a refinisher's nightmare condition called "Fisheye," refusing the application of a new finish.

Oiling Your Furniture

Oil finishes are another popular alternative to lacquer finishes, allowing the natural grains of the wood to show through. Oils stand up quite well to the test of time and durability, depending of course on how many coats get applied. A fairly protective coat can be achieved by applying several coats of a quality oil product... my preferred product being the MinWax oils, available in many colours for many types of wood. Danish oil is another product I like to recommend, especially for such wood items as railings, banisters, mantle pieces and door frames.

Although oil finishes are fairly time consuming to apply (the number of coats with drying time, plus the rubbing down with steel wool in between coats, etc.), the end result is usually lovely and rewarding to maintain.

To apply an oil finish (once all sanding and preparation is complete), dust wood piece thoroughly with a lint-free cloth then soak a small rag (or using a 1" paintbrush) in oil and scrub into wood evenly. Leave for approximately one or two minutes then wipe off excess. Allow to dry for 24 hours before steel-wooling, dusting off completely and applying yet another coat. The more coats the more shine, depending on your desired effect.

Prevention After A New Finish Is Applied

It is vital that you care for your wood furniture with these few easy considerations...

- 1 To protect your wood against water marks, do not place plants or beverage glasses on a surface without a protective tray first being placed.
- 2 Do not put anything hot on your wood surface (pizza boxes, hot pots, plates, etc.) without potholders or cutting boards first in place.
- 3 Wood furniture placed in a sunny window is susceptible to sun damage and lightening of colour.
- 4 Wood furniture placed over a heat register is susceptible to drying and warping.

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Materials Needed for Stripping Wood Surfaces

- 1 Ground cover, such as a plastic drop sheet, canvas cloth or newspapers
- 2 Can of quality GEL stripper
- 3 Can lacquer thinners
- 4 Paint brush
- 5 Tin can
- 6 Selection of medium to course steel wool
- 7 Scraper tools
- 8 Putty knife
- 9 Wire brushes

- 10 Eye goggles
- 11 Heavy duty rubber gloves
- 12 Protective clothing
- 13 Garbage bags and can
- 14 Container of fresh water to have on hand, in case of eye / skin splash

- 15 A piece of furniture needing TLC
- 16 Patience and persistence
- 17 Willingness to get grubby
- 18 Maybe the phone number of a professional, in case you opt out... smile

Materials Needed for Preparation & Lacquering Wood Surfaces

- 19 Ground cover, such as a plastic drop sheet, canvas cloth or newspapers
- 20 Fix Wood Patch
- 21 Putty knife
- 22 Various grades of sand paper, sanding block and electric sander (not circular)
- 23 Fine steel wool pads
- 24 Mohawk Wiping Stain or other, preselected for desired colour
- 25 Small paint brush
- 26 Various sizes of lint-free cotton cloths, to apply and wipe off excess after staining
- 27 Masking / green painting tape
- 28 Can(s) of sanding sealer or spray Shellac
- 29 Rubber gloves
- 30 Face mask
- 31 Can opener
- 32 Stir stick
- 33 Lacquer thinners, just “in case”
- 34 Garbage bags and can
- 35 Can(s) spray lacquer in desired type of sheen (matte, satin, semi-gloss, glossy).
Use pre-catalyzed for the most durable finish possible, especially table surfaces.
- 36 Aero or MinWax paste wax to finish and polish every few months